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Twitter as a Grammar Revision Method¹

Summary

Language instructors nowadays use social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Whatsapp) in the teaching–learning process. The application of social media platforms in teaching is believed to have a positive effect on the student's motivation and involvement. Previous research in the field has pointed toward its influence on the learner's communicative and linguistic competence. It has also been proved that using social media platforms has positively influenced the learner's language proficiency in the four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Many methods and approaches have been developed for teaching grammar, e.g., deductive, inductive, and eclectic. Regarding grammar revision, it has always been a quest to find the right method and approach to meet the differing needs of the learners. The aim of the present research is to evaluate the application of *Twitter* posts as the approach for grammar revision. The main characteristic feature of *Twitter* is that the tweets published are brief and concise. The students in the present research have been provided with a set of tweets for grammatical analysis and have been asked to reflect on their experiences.

Keywords: *Twitter*, grammar revision, grammar teaching, social media enhanced teaching.

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Tataurova,
Jekaterina Raka,
2023
[https://doi.org/
10.37384/
SM.2023.15.060](https://doi.org/10.37384/SM.2023.15.060)

¹ This work has been supported by the European Social Fund within the Project No 8.2.2.0/20/1/008 “Strengthening of PhD students and academic personnel of Riga Technical University and BA School of Business and Finance in the strategic fields of specialization” of the Specific Objective 8.2.2 “To Strengthen Academic Staff of Higher Education Institutions in Strategic Specialization Areas” of the Operational Programme “Growth and Employment”.

TWITTER IZMANTOŠANA KĀ GRAMĀTIKAS ATKĀRTOŠANAS PIEEJA

Kopsavilkums

Mūsdienās valodu skolotāji mācību procesā izmanto sociālos tīklus (piemēram, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok un Whatsapp). Tiek uzskatīts, ka sociālo mediju platformu izmantošana mācību procesā pozitīvi ietekmē studentu motivāciju un iesaisti. Līdzšinējie pētījumi šajā jomā ir parādījuši to ietekmi uz izglītojamā komunikatīvo un valodas kompetenci. Ir arī pierādīts, ka sociālo mediju platformu izmantošana pozitīvi ietekmē izglītojamā četras valodas prasmes: runāšanu, klausīšanos, lasīšanu un rakstīšanu. Gramatikas mācīšanai ir izstrādātas dažādas metodes un pieejas, piemēram, deduktīvā, induktīvā un eklektiskā metode. Attiecībā uz gramatikas atkārtošanu vienmēr ir bijusi jāmeklē pareizā metode un pieeja, lai apmierinātu atšķirīgas izglītojamo vajadzības. Šī pētījuma mērķis ir novērtēt mācīšanas pieeju – Twitter ierakstu izmantošanu gramatikas atkārtošanai. Galvenā Twitter raksturīgā iezīme ir tā, ka publicētie tvīti ir īsi un kodolīgi. Šajā pētījumā skolēniem tika iedots tvītu kopums, kur analizēt gramatiku, un viņiem tika lūgts atspoguļot savu pieredzi.

Raksturvārdi: *Twitter*, gramatikas atkārtošana, gramatikas mācīšana, sociālo tīklu pastiprināta mācīšana.

Introduction

Social Networks, along with Hybrid and Online Learning, Mobile Learning, Online Learning, Artificial Intelligence, Flipped Classrooms, Cloud Computing, Gamification, Augmented Reality, and Virtual Reality, have been indicated as one of the main technological trends in education (Horizon 2022). Nowadays, social media is increasingly used in education, especially in teaching and learning foreign languages. Previous research suggests that using social media in the classroom increases learners' motivation, attendance, and engagement. Hernández and Pérez (2016) claim that the young generation learns when the aspect of learning is relevant to them, when there exists a social link with the matter to be learned, or when there is some personal interest. The young generation describes social media-enhanced classes as entertaining, fun, motivational, and exciting, as it allows them to study through the media with which they are already familiar. Twitter, the subject of interest in this research, has previously primarily been applied to the development of students' linguistic and communicative competence. The present research aims to evaluate its potential for grammar revision.

Application of social media in language learning

There are multiple advantages to the use of social media in the foreign language classroom. First, it allows the opportunity to engage in conversation, communicate knowledge and ideas, give feedback, reflect on the experience, and study together (Crook et al. 2008; Moody 2010). Secondly, it has been claimed that students who use social media while learning a language develop their communication skills, as well as express their ideas in a more creative way (Greenhow 2010). Moreover, students are exposed to real-life language that native speakers use to communicate on social media. The educators may offer the students the opportunity to discuss the unfamiliar grammatical structures or vocabulary they have encountered on social media (Mukhtar et al. 2019). Furthermore, the students who apply social media are inclined to support each other and communicate more both within and outside the classroom (Collins, Halverson 2010). Then, the use of social media improves the critical skills of the students (e.g., by means of participating in online discussion forums) (Mukhtar et al. 2019). Whereas, it makes the learning process personalised. Harrison and Thomas (2009) suggest that nowadays, there are more kinesthetic and visual learners due to the great amount of time young learners spend in front of digital devices. Therefore, delivering the information in an auditory form is not the most efficient way to teach today's learners. In addition, it gives the opportunity to engage in communication at their own pace and time – it does not require an immediate reply (Mukhtar et al. 2019). Finally, it develops their digital skills, which are very important skills in the modern world dominated by digital media (Lowe, Laffey 2011; Levinson 2011).

The previous research on the use of social media in the foreign language classroom has led to the following findings:

1. In the research by Shih (2011), the students used Facebook to communicate with their peers. It has been observed that the application of Facebook has decreased learners' stress levels and allowed them to communicate their thoughts freely. Moreover, it has positively affected the learners' engagement in the learning process.
2. The research by Yunus et al. (2012) proved that the application of social networking platforms in the foreign language classroom enhances the learners' interaction in the English language setting.

3. The study conducted by White (2009) showed the correlation between the use of social media and the learners' motivation and academic writing skills. The researcher also hypothesised that the possibility of communicating with teachers and peers, which the social networking platforms gave to the students, has decreased the learners' stress levels.
4. The learners participating in the research conducted by Zaidieh (2012) have suggested that they felt less tension in regard to timing as they were not supposed to react immediately as they did in the classroom; therefore, they noticed that it made them feel more comfortable. It has also been observed that the use of social media advanced the learners' critical thinking skills.

Currently, multiple social media platforms can assist the language learning process in various ways depending on their application. For instance, Facebook can be applied as a material sharing, group communication, and blogging platform. Whatsapp and Telegram may be used for blogging and content sharing. TikTok allows presenting content within the boundaries of a short video clip, while Twitter's main function is microblogging.

Application of Twitter in language learning

Sah (2015) refers to Twitter as a microblogging platform that allows users to post short messages, usually within 140–200 characters. Microblogging allows for real-time communication by using various means, one of which is Twitter. Twitter, launched in 2006, is one of the most widely applied micro-blogs. Users use it to communicate with people from all over the world, which helps them to see the actual situation of what is happening with others in real-time. Users can comment, share, and follow recent news and see it from the perspective of those involved in the state of affairs. Initially, the size of a regular tweet was limited to 140 characters; in 2017, the limit was extended to 280 characters, distinguished from notes, the length of which is up to 2,500 words. Still, the nature of tweets remained the same, which is short and concise. People use Twitter to share personal and professional information and to discuss topics, ideas, issues, and news (ibid.).

The previous research on the application of Twitter in language learning has led to the following conclusions:

1. Lee (2011) has suggested that the students felt less constrained in terms of the time, manner, and length of the work they wished to publish when they used blogs. It allows them to develop the ability to manage, comprehend and organise their learning (Baggetun, Wasson 2006).
2. Lomicka and Lord (2011) claimed that through the application of mobile and digital devices, the use of Twitter enhanced the collaboration between learners and developed their language skills, owing to the fun and interactive way of learning. Similarly, Macaro (1997: 87) pointed out that Twitter promotes collaboration by making students “achieve common learning goals by working together rather than with the teacher” (Macaro 1997:87).
3. The study of Borau et al. (2009) showed the positive impact of the use of Twitter on the communicative and cultural competence of the learners because the traditional language learning methods rarely allow learners to communicate in the language.
4. Junco et al. (2012) observed that with the application of Twitter in the classroom, students' engagement has increased, and it has had a positive impact on the final grades.
5. Veletsianos (2011) investigated the reasons why educators benefit from the application of Twitter. Those were (1) willingness to share their knowledge, materials, and experience; (2) an opportunity to share struggles and issues they experienced, asking for suggestions on how to overcome those; (3) the need for social inclusivity and communication; as well as (4) the wish to make a reference to the other social networking platforms they use for communication, e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, etc.
6. Bicen, Cavus (2012: 34) suggested that Twitter is “part social networking – part microblogging tool, freely, accessible on the web”. The researchers found that students most frequently shared quotes, pictures, memes, music, videos, and news and were less likely to share educational content.
7. Haytko and Parker (2012) have identified that the majority of learners do not see the potential of social networking platforms in language learning. Some study participants created a Twitter account only because it was one of the course requirements.

8. Elavsky, Mislán, and Elavsky (2011) investigated the perspective of the application of Twitter in a large hall lecture setting. It proved beneficial in terms of its positive influence on the learners' engagement, perspectives, and learning.

To conclude, Twitter's application has proven beneficial to language learning. The major advantages of its use have been increased engagement, collaboration, and the ability to share views and perspectives with unfamiliar users (Sah 2015). Moreover, it allows engaging the learners who might be unwilling to participate in classroom discussions due to their introverted personalities. The fact that tweets are usually limited to 280 characters makes learners familiar with new grammatical structures and demands creativity and conciseness in writing. Twitter can be applied as a means of making classroom materials more understandable to learners. Finally, students have the possibility to communicate with native speakers and stay informed about what is happening in the world (ibid.).

Application of Twitter for teaching grammar

Sah (2015) emphasises that Twitter's major advantage when teaching grammar is its content's authenticity; however, the instructor should be aware that not all Twitter users are highly proficient in the English language. It has been claimed by Antenos-Conforti (2009) that the course requirement to use Twitter for blogging improved students' writing skills in terms of grammar and vocabulary. As Schmidt (1990) suggested in his Noticing Hypothesis, humans are only learning the linguistic items they notice. Students may notice unfamiliar grammatical constructions, lexical items, and terminology and may discuss it in the classroom. Moreover, students and educators may identify grammatical mistakes in students' tweets and give some feedback on them, which the teacher may later elaborate on (Sah 2015). Terrell (2016) offers English learners to follow these accounts on Twitter for pictures, memes, tasks, quizzes, and advice on developing grammatical skills @Grammarly, @EnglishClub, @GrammarMonkeys, @The_YU Niversity, @English247. The hashtag #grammar will also help to identify more grammatical resources (ibid.). Another method suggested by the author was to correct the tweets made by celebrities, that the authors of the present research performed with the group of students.

Methodology

For the benefit of this research, 65 tweets written by celebrities were extracted from Twitter. The reason for selecting the specific tweets for the analysis was the variety of grammatical mistakes presented.

26 first-year bachelor's level students of the Faculty of Engineering Economics and Management of Riga Technical University participated in the study. For a month, the students were presented with 15–17 tweets for analysis at the beginning of each class. The analysis was followed by the classroom discussion. The discussion was extended from the original focus on only grammatical aspects to spelling, syntax, and typography.

Later, the students were asked to reflect on their experience using Twitter for grammatical revision by completing the questionnaire in Google Forms.

Use of Twitter for grammatical revision

The table below summarises the types of grammatical, syntactical, and typographical mistakes in the analysed tweets.

Table 1.

The variety of mistakes identified in the analyzed tweets

Type of mistake	No. of occurrences
Missing or wrong preposition	3
Capital letters	24
Spelling	13
Missing or wrong article	10
Wrong tense	7
A wrong word or word form	18
The subject and verbal agreement	3
Missing or wrong apostrophe	17
Missing word	13
Missing or wrong punctuation	22
Word order	3
Unclear message	3

As presented in the table above, the most frequent types of grammatical mistakes were the lack of capital letters in the proper names (e.g., titles of TV shows, names of celebrities and sports teams; some examples of *I* not being capitalized were also identified), the missing or wrong punctuation, which in the majority of cases, interfered with the understanding of the message, the wrong word or word form – the instances of *then* applied instead of *than*, *this* instead of *these*, *their* instead of *they're* were quite

common; some individual instances were the use of *understand estimate* instead of *underestimate*, *effect* in place of *affect*, or *bare* for *bear*. The missing or wrong apostrophe followed this – the most frequently used cases of missing apostrophes were those of *its* vs *it's* and *Im*. 13 occurrences of a missing word were found – those were, for the most part, grammatical words or demonstratives, such as *been*, *that*, *there*, *when*. The same number of spelling mistakes was registered – some examples of misspelt words are *intelligents*, *preassure*. 10 instances of missing or wrong definite or indefinite article uses were identified, followed by the seven cases of the wrong tense uses – *your order has shipped*, *I head to china*, *It have been an age that I didn't tweet*. Lastly, three cases of a missing or wrong preposition (e.g., *based in the fact*, *matter fact*), the wrong subject and verbal agreement (e.g., *he look away*, *he know what he did*), word order (e.g., *losing not an option*, and *to be the man to score most goals against city for utd very proud*), and unclear message were recognised (*no bottle too nervous*).

The results of the survey carried out to investigate the students' views on the application of Twitter in the classroom for grammatical revision are presented below.

In the first question of the questionnaire, the students were asked to select the social media platforms they used regularly. It has been identified that Twitter is among the platforms used by the minority of the respondents – out of 26 respondents, only five use Twitter. WhatsApp and Instagram are the social media platforms used by most of the respondents, 24 and 23 learners respectively, followed by TikTok and Facebook – used by 18 and 16 students. 12 people marked that they use Telegram, and 10 selected Pinterest (see Figure 1 below).

Which of the social media platforms listed below do you use?
26 responses

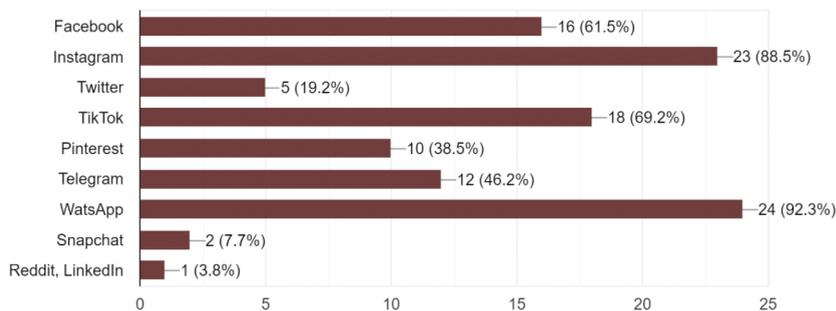


Figure 1. The social media platforms used by the respondents

As regards the social media platforms used by the majority of learners for language learning, those are Instagram and TikTok, which were selected by 15 and 11 respondents. They were followed by Twitter and Telegram – both were chosen by four learners. Three students selected Facebook and YouTube, and WhatsApp was marked by two people. Other responses were 'None' and 'None of them specifically for language learning'; one person claimed that they use 'Duolingo', and another referred to 'online games', which are not the topics of this research (See Figure 2 below for results).

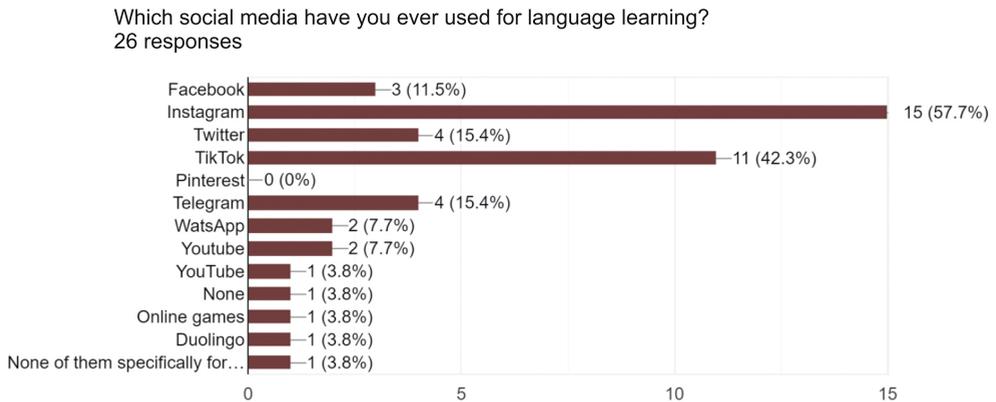


Figure 2. **The social media platforms used for language learning**

When asked why the respondents primarily use social media, two people selected education, five – entertainment and communication, and 20 respondents chose all of the above (see Figure 3 for results).

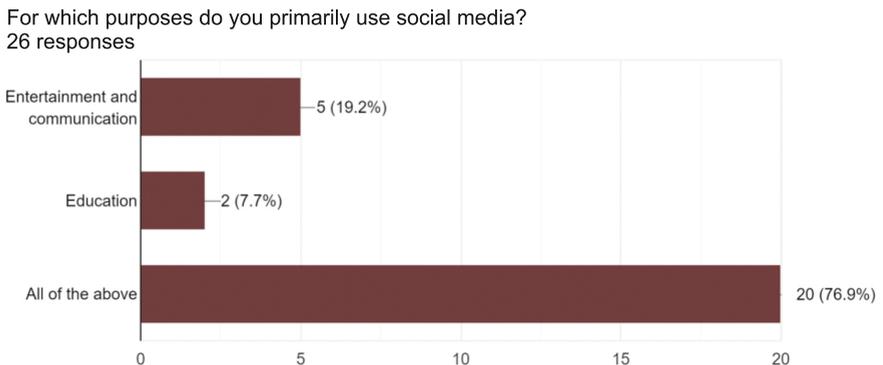


Figure 3. **The reasons why the respondents use social media**

As regards the suitability of Twitter for the development of various language aspects, nine learners selected both grammar and vocabulary. 23 out of 26 respondents viewed Twitter as useful for developing communication skills. Six people suggested that Twitter could be applied to develop writing skills. One learner marked in the other section that Twitter is more suitable for entertainment (see Figure 4 below).

For which aspects of language learning is Twitter suitable in your opinion?
26 responses

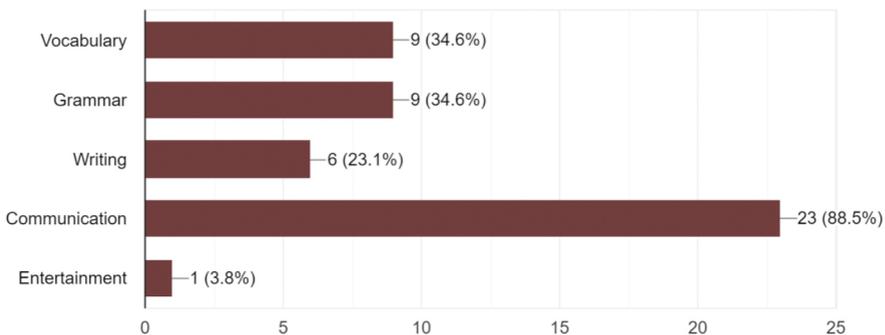


Figure 4. **The suitability of Twitter for the development of various language aspects**

11 learners, or 42.3 %, claimed that they do not pay attention to grammatical mistakes in tweets, while eight people, or 30.8 %, suggested that they do pay attention to those. Seven respondents, or 26.9 % were uncertain, and selected cannot decide (see Figure 5 below).

Do you often pay attention to the grammatical mistakes in tweets?
26 responses

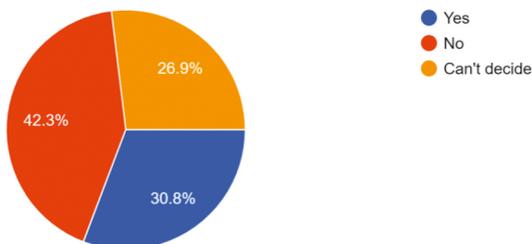


Figure 5. **The characteristic of paying attention to the grammatical mistakes of tweets by the respondents**

Concerning the types of grammatical mistakes the students pay more attention to on Twitter, these are spelling (selected by 18 learners), wrong words (chosen by 14 students), and capital letters (marked by 13 respondents). As concerns punctuation, word order, and missing or wrong preposition, those options were specified by 10 people each. The other responses were missing or wrong articles (suggested by nine respondents), apostrophes (indicated by five learners), pronouns (proposed by four students), and modal verbs (marked by three people) (See Figure 6 for results).

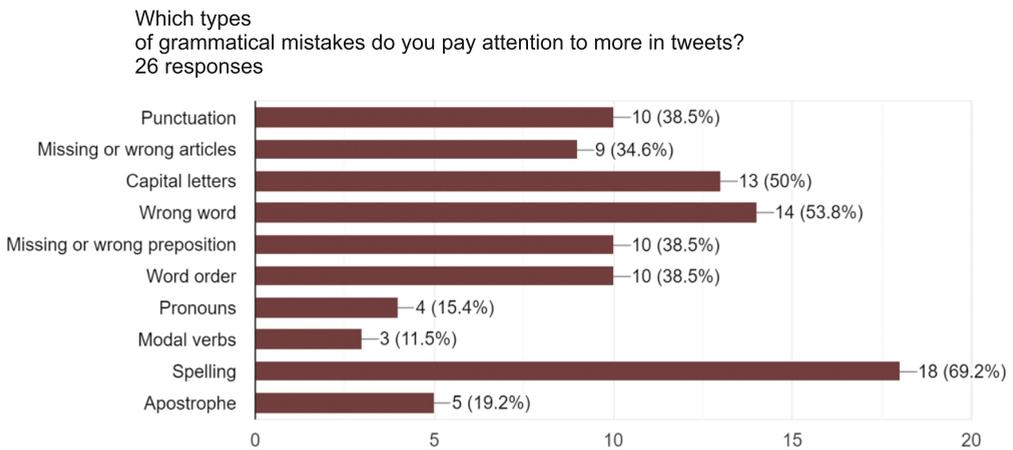


Figure 6. The types of grammatical mistakes the learners pay more attention to on Twitter

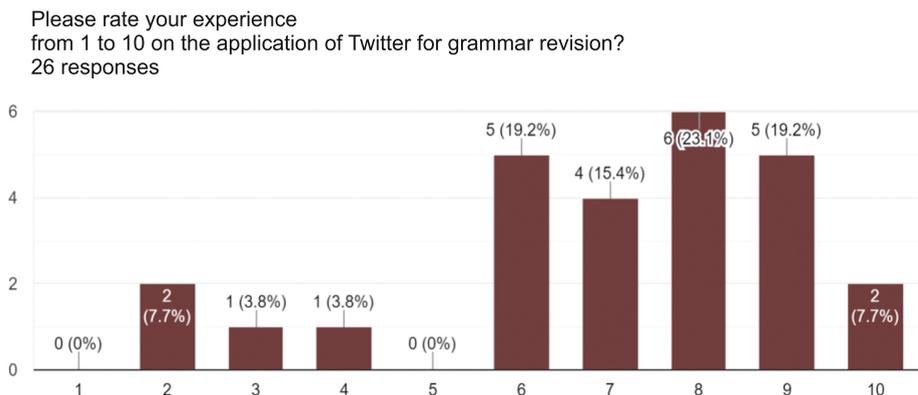


Figure 7. The evaluation of the activity on a scale from 1 to 10

For the following question, the learners were required to evaluate their experience with using Twitter for grammatical revision on a scale from 1 to 10. A large part of the learners, or six people, assessed their experience with a grade of 8 points. It was followed by grades 6, 9, and 7 points (assigned by five, five, and four students, respectively). The average grade assigned to this activity by the respondents is 7 points (see Figure 7 below for results).

Three respondents used the comments and recommendations section for the following commentaries. One of the respondents suggested that the activity was interesting, and the other claimed that it would be more useful to use Twitter to develop vocabulary and communication skills. Finally, one of the learners asked for more activities like this and described it as unique and unusual.

Conclusions

The theoretical analysis has suggested that the application of social media in language learning has proved successful for multiple reasons, such as the development of the learners' communicative, linguistic, and critical skills, the increased proficiency of learners in the four language skills, namely listening, writing, speaking and reading, the positive influence on the learners' motivation, engagement, and creativity, as well as decreased stress level.

The use of Twitter, in its turn, has also been found beneficial in language learning for the following reasons: development of communicative and cultural competence, positive effect on students' involvement, collaboration, and overall learning, as proved by the improved final grades, as well as the fact that it was described as fun and interactive.

The analysis of the selected tweets showed that because of the great variety of grammatical syntactical mistakes, Twitter can be applied as a source of authentic language for analysis. As regards its application for grammatical revision in the classroom, the method has proved to be of moderate success for the following reasons.

First of all, there has been some criticism on the part of the respondents. The reason for that was that the learners did not view Twitter as the relevant platform for grammatical analysis as the language of Twitter, as perceived by the learners, should not be grammatically accurate. The questionnaire supports this view, with most learners specifying that they do not pay attention to grammatical mistakes on Twitter. Moreover, the students suggested that

Twitter is more suitable for developing vocabulary and communication skills than for grammatical review. Furthermore, it is suggested that Twitter is less popular amongst the young generation than, for instance, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram. Finally, the learners accentuated that they believed TikTok and Instagram to be more suitable for language learning, allowing for the mastery of various skills, such as grammar, vocabulary, communication, pronunciation, and listening.

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